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## Orphans of the Motherland: Puerto Rican Images of Spain in Jacobo Morales's *Linda Sara*

### Abstract

Puerto Rican identity has been confounded by Puerto Rico's prolonged colonial relationship to Spain (nearly 80 years longer than that of most other Latin American colonies) and its abrupt change in status to that of United States protectorate in 1898 after the Spanish American War. Increasingly, Puerto Rican identity has been theorized in sole reference to the political relationship with the United States. The residual presence of Spain and Spaniards in the construction of the new Puerto Rican collective, and the denial or nostalgia that might still be elicited by the former empire, have gradually receded into the background. Perhaps surprisingly, the presence of Spain and reactions to it find their widest outlet in popular culture. This article analyzes the complex portrayal of the continuing substratum of the Spanish heritage in Puerto Rico in one example from Puerto Rican popular culture—Jacobo Morales's 1994 film *Linda Sara*. The film's characters either willingly or unknowingly falsify their Spanish past, recounting their (hi)story according to their present needs.

### Keywords

Puerto Rico, Spain, *Linda Sara*, Jacobo Morales, colonialism, United States, protectorate, identity

## Orphans of the Motherland: Puerto Rican Images of Spain in Jacobo Morales's *Linda Sara*

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In the early twentieth century, the paradigmatic doubt of western culture—to be or not to be—acquired a slightly different emphasis with regard to Puerto Rican identity. In 1929, the journal *Índice* presented local intellectuals with an open invitation to enter a debate about the basic question: “Are we, or are we not? What are we and how are we?” (Barceló 16). Almost a century of cultural theory has pondered, reformulated, and answered the query in different ways, but increasingly it has been posed in sole reference to the political relationship with the United States of America. The residual presence of Spain and Spaniards in the construction of the new Puerto Rican collective, and the denial or nostalgia that might still be elicited by the former empire, have gradually receded into the background. Perhaps surprisingly, the presence of Spain and reactions to it find their widest outlet in the domain of popular culture. For example, Jacobo Morales’s 1994 film *Linda Sara* is a prime creative response to the unsolved identity riddle. The film’s proposed solution, as I will develop after some historical and theoretical considerations, operates less at the level of reason than at the level of cultural performance. Thus it constitutes a fresh approach to the challenge of how to exploit the dynamic tension between the different elements of Puerto Rican identity.

Puerto Rico’s national history provides some clues to the widespread sense of uncertainty occasioned by the question of self-definition. Unlike most former Spanish colonies, Puerto Rico never underwent a successful process of secession from Spain. The sense

of nationality that had slowly developed over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and manifested itself in cultural and political projects demanding either greater autonomy or independence was prematurely thrown into crisis by the transfer of sovereignty after the 1898 Spanish-American War. The Treaty of Paris put an end to the conflict by handing over control of the island—together with Cuba, the Philippines, and Guam—to the United States of America. Puerto Ricans now faced the task of defining themselves *vis-à-vis* two metropolises: one that almost overnight had acquired absolute political and economic power, and one that, even after losing power, still loomed large in the island's cultural repertoire.

Those Puerto Ricans who welcomed the American invasion portrayed it as a rational return to a natural community. As Yauco Mayor Francisco Mejía Rodríguez expressed to his townsfolk in July of 1898, “we are, by the miraculous intervention of the God of the just, given back to the bosom of our mother America, in whose waters nature placed us as people of America” (Sterner). In addition to Mejía's Spanish surname, one should note his political position (and presumed social class) within a prosperous sugar- and coffee-producing municipality, which points to the particular economic dynamics behind such patriotic sentiments.<sup>1</sup> In his 1980 essay “El país de cuatro pisos” (The Four Story Country), José Luis González explains the attitude of Puerto Rican landowners to the new American presence:

The Puerto Rican landowning class welcomed the North American invasion . . . as the arrival of liberty, democracy, and progress in Puerto Rico. . . . Disillusion came only when the new metropolis made it clear that the invasion did not include the Puerto Rican proprietary class's participation in the succulent banquet of the expansive North American capitalist economy. . . . Then and only then was this class's “nationalism” born. . . . [Its] cultural production . . . under the Spanish colonial regime was of liberal-bourgeois orientation; but the new relation of social forces under the North American regime obliged the marginalized and expropriated proprietary class . . . to fight for the conservation of the cultural values of their landed sector. [Their] tellurism . . . [responds] to a very concrete longing . . . for the land lost, and not the land understood as a symbol or metaphor, but as a means

Hence, in González's view, traditional Puerto Rican *independentismo* flourished, not among the masses, but among the (white) elites. In the context of economic loss, this class needed to differentiate itself both from the new American oligarchy and from the largely *mestizo* classes it had previously been able to exploit, so that a community based on genealogy began to seem more natural than one based on geography. The early twentieth-century Puerto Rican bourgeoisie turned for its identity to a paradoxical combination of nationalism and nostalgia that served as a marker of distinction in what Pierre Bourdieu might call the dominated among the dominant. Throughout the century, this attitude was frequently—and shrewdly—denounced by the masses as a “desire to ‘return to the times of Spain’” (González 35).

In this way, early answers to the budding questions of “what we are” and “how we are”—understandably produced by bourgeois intellectuals—cast Spain in a very different light from what one might expect given the former colonial relationship. Alongside negative images of the onetime imperial power, there flourish positive images that embrace the Spanish past as a form of resistance to North American rule; indeed, as the originary form of Puerto Rican identity. Antonio S. Pedreira, himself part of the *Índice* group, writes in his landmark cultural treatise *Insularismo* (1935) that “Spain is no more than an attitude on the spectrum of western culture, and we are an American gesture of Spanish culture” (24). According to Pedreira, given the premature extermination of the indigenous element, the “*fusión*” (27) of the Spanish and African races produces the “*con-fusión*” that is Puerto Rican identity. The fusion is not, however, one of equals: “There mediated between both [races] the difference that separates the free man from the slave, the civilized person from the barbarian, the European from the African. The white race was legislative, the black executive; one imposed the project and made order; the other offered the labor and obeyed” (28). Although Pedreira decries the “horrendous and bestial sentiment of social prejudice” (31), the hierarchy established is evident throughout his text: “at times of historical transcendence in which the martial rhythms of European blood flourish in our gestures, we are capable of the highest enterprises and the strongest heroisms. But when the gesture comes soaked in African blood, we are left

indecisive, as though gaping at colored beads" (32).

Pedreira's prescription for the much-needed definition and development of the island nation's "esencia" (24) was for Puerto Ricans to develop their own "gesture" of the western and Spanish "attitude," that is, to imprint their own uniqueness onto the Spanish legacy: "Culturally, we were and continue to be a Hispanic colony. And yet within the harmony of our race we have the beginnings of a special rhythm" (26). His formula evidently omits from that usable past other cultural elements, and thus reactions, if not to Pedreira specifically, then more generally to his implicitly or explicitly racist discourse, soon appear. In the 1920s and 1930s, in the face of what Arcadio Díaz Quiñones calls "the nation doubly hegemonized, by the empire that was and by the empire that is" (143), an important sector of the Puerto Rican *intelligentsia* began to rescue the voices silenced by the Europeanizing and Americanizing establishment via literature, popular culture, and literary and cultural criticism.

In defiance of the idealization of the Spanish past—this time manifested in Ex-Governor Rafael Hernández Colón's 1991 declaration of Spanish as Puerto Rico's only official language, for which Spain conferred the Príncipe de Asturias Prize on the whole country—Díaz Quiñones writes in "La política del olvido" (1991 The Politics of Forgetting) that "I am now interested in seeing another story, in which the Spanish language appears as the language of the power of conquest and of forced conversion" (154). He rightly insists on the recovery of what he sees as the two great obliterations on which modern Puerto Rican culture built itself: the originary exclusion of the culture and languages of the African slaves and the more recent bicultural and bilingual Puerto Rican diaspora created by the massive migration of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Díaz Quiñones's own effort caps a tradition of cultural retrieval that includes both literary texts and critical works. As Juan Flores comments regarding Díaz Quiñones's cultural revisionism: "the author himself . . . recognizes that he is not the first to bring it up when he mentions the many writers and thinkers who have recognized its importance" (Flores 74).

The critical tradition reclaiming the role of those excluded elements in the crucible of Puerto Rican national identity has undoubtedly made an invaluable contribution to the understanding

of the culture. But challenges remain that should be tackled rather than ignored, so that this necessary recovery of the repressed can become the point of departure for new explorations of cultural complexity, instead of an endlessly reiterated point of arrival. This kind of approach, however, unwittingly replaces one story with another, and by extension one silence with another silence. The authority the revisionist cultural discourse has attained makes it difficult to study the interactions generated by the intercultural exchange of the colonial situation, except from politically- and morally-charged positions. If, in political and economic terms, the limitations imposed by the colonial relationship on the colony are overwhelming, it is just as true that in cultural terms they open up numerous modalities of identity and expression that are inherently neither good nor bad.

As Juan Flores writes, “it was not enough to point out the rupture and attempt to restore the lost unity by mentioning forgotten names and events. These splicings and frontiers of national experience cannot continue to be formulated as mere absences or empty spaces but as places that can generate new ways of relating, new meanings” (75). Through his critiques both of Díaz Quiñones and José Luis González, Flores proposes an alternative approach that can overcome the drawbacks of a more traditional revisionism:

In spite of the very welcome brush strokes of historical revisionism, in the final analysis González has recourse to an essentialist viewpoint, which is most evident in his explosive affirmation that ‘the first Puerto Ricans were actually black Puerto Ricans.’ Rather than the authentic original roots of a cultural tree or the ground floor of a cultural edifice, our African heritage should be considered as a guide to a dynamically changing cultural site within the surrounding cultural geography. Perhaps [Pedreira’s] image of the navigator with the “thematic compass” can be useful after all in combating the still accepted metaphor of organic growth and the constructivist plans that attempt to replace them.

The most recent typical response to the Eurocentrism and relativism of the syncretic model seems to be what we could call a relational model designed to identify the contacts and crossings that culture experiences as a social practice. . . . When we refer to national culture, it is not the island’s beaches that define what we are and how we are, but rather the extensions of sea, land, and air that join our cultural territory with the Other(s) (30).

Instead of an opposite version of Pedreira's concern with *esencia*, Flores suggests a relational study of the cultural elements that are inevitably in interplay in a (post)colonial situation. In a way, the *cómo somos* begins to take precedence over the *qué somos*.

Although Flores does not go into theoretical clarifications, the terms he deploys—transference, interference, displacement (83)—point toward pragmatic theories of culture such as Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory. Even-Zohar is concerned with the types of "socio-cultural juncture where transfer plays a role" (1), that is, with intercultural situations in which contact between social groups leads to import and integration of options for comprehending and organizing collective life. From such standpoints, Puerto Rico (understood in cultural rather than strictly territorial terms) becomes, not the exceptional case of a failed nation that never succeeded in establishing itself as a state and constructing a distinctive cultural repertoire, but a paradigmatic space of cultural plurality and negotiation. As a strategy for coping with the constant threat of political absorption, the ability to import and appropriate models of being and behavior is a sensible approach to survival.

From such a relational standpoint I note one of the new silences that have replaced the old absences inscribed by essentialist discourse onto the picture of Puerto Rican identity. As a Puerto Rican-born scholar of Spanish literature and culture, I have always been struck by the overwhelming presence of Spain—or at least of an autochthonous version of what Spain is—in the island's collective psyche. In the mid-twentieth century Spanish heritage continued to be an indicator of class and race invoked, with or without basis in reality, by certain social groups. Spanish lineage is also a politically profitable symbol of a tradition that serves as a point of opposition to American hegemony. At the same time it brings Puerto Rico into the sphere of the once-again thriving Europe rather than that of the trouble-laden African continent. Spain permeates Puerto Rican daily life: the España and La Cibeles bakeries (serving the best *criollo* bread); the notable presence of Spanish priests and teachers in churches and private schools; the long history of the Casa de España and other social clubs that celebrate the peninsular legacy; the popularity of *pasodobles* in dancing halls; the Spanish musicals that a whole generation of Puerto Ricans watched (and memorized) on



the 1970s *Telecine de la tarde*; or the current widespread viewing of TVE Internacional on cable TV. Despite political disconnection, and despite the fact that the socioeconomic status of a majority of Puerto Ricans makes travel to Europe impossible, Spain furnishes a wealth of accurate or erroneous representations, real or imagined relations, new or residual contacts that form a very rich part of the Puerto Rican *qué somos*. Nevertheless, as striking as this presence is, there is a dearth of cultural products exploring it, as well as a lack of “acceptable” terms with which to account for the effects of the contact between the two nations’ cultural repertoire in the context of their shared history.

Jacobo Morales’s film *Linda Sara* is very intriguing in this respect. Despite the filmmaker’s insistence in his production diary on the fact that “the characters are imminently Puerto Rican, in that everything is based upon our authentic realities” (Morales 26), one of the most striking aspects of the film is its portrayal of Spain and Spaniards. Like so many recent Spanish American fictions, *Linda Sara* is a story of lineage revolving around the physical and symbolic space of a family house. Although the home is presumably located in Old San Juan, the film’s visual setting is a composite colonial town that hides the contemporary American influence clearly visible throughout Puerto Rico’s capital. In a sense, the treatment of nationality in the film is similarly structured; while it nominally includes the usual figures of recovery in the character of a mixed-race Newyorican girl, it concentrates attention on Spanish heritage and the conflicts to which it gives rise for the definition of Puerto Rican identity.

The action takes place in 1990s Puerto Rico, with frequent flashbacks to the late 1930s, when a young Sara first fell in love with the student Alejandro. Sara’s father, Don Hermógenes Defilló, did not approve of Alejandro, an activist who wrote against landowners in the local papers, and whose own father, a sharecropper in Defilló’s sugar plantation, was killed in the 1937 Ponce massacre.<sup>3</sup> Undeterred by her father’s prohibitions, Sara eloped with Alejandro, only to return home the very next day, after Don Hermógenes died suddenly as he prepared to go after the lovers. Sara and Alejandro were separated; he left Puerto Rico, and she was forced to marry another man, José Vicente Escudero, with whom she lived in her own childhood

home until his death more than fifty years later. When the film's present begins, Escudero has just had a heart attack, from which he will die shortly. Sara, now in her seventies, lives with three of their children: Gustavo, who is head of the household even though he doesn't work; Sofia, a hyperfeminine socialite whose only occupation is singing zarzuela in her musical *soirées*; and Mayito, engaged in writing an interminable volume of family "histories and memories."<sup>4</sup> Also living in the house is Sara's half black, half Newyorican granddaughter Tita, daughter of a deceased son. News of Escudero's imminent death brings a fifth son, Pablo (played by Jacobo Morales himself), back from Spain, where he has lived for many years in little contact with the family. Gustavo's Spanish ex-wife, Pilar, and their son Tavito, who is afflicted with Down's syndrome, are also staying at the house for a few days. Among all these people, but with barely any real interaction with them, moves a silent and nostalgic Sara, who hasn't said a single word for many years.

This unproductive bunch finds itself on the verge of bankruptcy. So as not to lose the heavily mortgaged house, Pablo comes up with the idea of auctioning off the many antiques with which it is furnished. But in order to fetch the most money, each object must have a compelling story. As Pablo explains, "it is a matter of combining reality with fiction and . . . giving a certain historical relevance to the family." For example, "the sword I have seen in the attic could have belonged to Captain Fernando Defilló y Echenique . . . who heroically fought against the Dutch at the Castillo del Morro in 1742." When Mayito points out that 'Don Fernando was the first to surrender, and the Dutch attack was in 1625,' it is decided that they will have to combine their respective talents for fantasy and fact. On the night of the auction, among the chiefly American customers, a mysterious stranger—Alejandro himself—purchases every item, insisting nonetheless that everything remain in the house so that Sara never finds out about her children's scam. In the days that follow, the family members lead a more "authentic" life. Gustavo writes to Pilar, who has returned to Spain with Tita as well as Tavito, telling her he is saving up so he can join them for Christmas. He also tells her that the first volume of Mayito's history has been published to great acclaim, and that Sofia has moved in with her friend Paula. We have to fill in the blanks regarding the significance of this latter

detail when, at the end of the film, we see Sofia, no longer wearing her elegant dresses and standing at the balcony very close to Paula. We recognize Paula from a mysterious scene in which Sofia became extremely nervous when she showed up at her musical soirée.<sup>5</sup> Sofia is calling out for Gustavo to come see Sara, who is romantically riding away with Alejandro in a horse-drawn carriage.

*Linda Sara* is a simple, perhaps simple-minded, love story, but it also has political and economic dimensions, and, most importantly, it is a story about the figuration of individual and national identity. Its message of authenticity targets a morally and financially bankrupt Puerto Rican bourgeoisie that has customarily constructed its own character in exclusive reference to its Spanish (and thus white) origins, while at the same time selling itself to American capitalism. *Linda Sara* exposes the falseness of this class's values through constant allusion to its hypocrisy, which includes a large measure of ignorance of the Spanish heritage it romanticizes. An example is the following pathetic exchange between Pablo, Gustavo, and Mayito, as the former tries to come up with stories for their family heirlooms:

Pablo: General Miles, the commander and chief of the North American occupations forces could have sat . . . on this sofa when he came to this house to pay his respects to our maternal grandfather.

Gustavo: Grandfather would never have received a general of the invading army!

Pablo: Well then, it was Spanish Captain Sebastián Ortega who sat there just before departing to take charge of the last garrison to go into combat against General Miles.

Mayito: That was Lieutenant Colonel Francisco Puig.

Except for Mayito the historian (and that, as we shall see, only to a certain extent), the Escudero Defillós know little about either Puerto Rican history or the ancestors with whose lineage they so proudly identify.

Despite its apparent critique of Puerto Rico's flawed pride in its Spanish history, the film often indulges in the same vices it implicitly censures in its characters. The references to and identification with Spain allude to a fabricated Spain conjured up according to stereotypical ideas of what it represents. During his Spanish stay, Pablo unearthed and adopted the title of Conde de Arellanos [Count

Arellanos], an old title of nobility purportedly corresponding to the family. In terms of cultural identification, this information seems to be a significant lie. Ramírez de Arellano was the maternal surname of the famous Puerto Rican pirate Roberto Cofresí, a type of Robin Hood figure executed by the Spanish colonial government in 1825. Pilar herself questions: “and where did he get that title?” Yet Pablo’s presumed ruse seems to have fooled at least some real Spaniards. At the beginning of the film, when Gustavo calls Pablo in Spain to tell him about their father’s illness, the person who answers the phone refers to him as the Count. With the name of the island pirate, Pablo appears to have made his fortune in Spain, albeit temporarily. In another scene, Pablo laments, upon revealing his own financial situation to Gustavo: “Now it is difficult for me to hunt foxes, play polo, win over a beautiful upper-class heiress. . . . Times have changed.” His tone and demeanor, combined with other verbal and visual elements, suggest that this is a truth-telling confession. However, the remark’s content is completely fabricated (for example, fox hunting and polo are traditional activities of the British, not the Spanish, aristocracy).

With the name Arellano, as with the name Defilló, Morales seems to favor maternal lineage. Rather than a paternal line of descent, which in a political allegory might point to the United States, Pablo has reclaimed the *madre patria* of which Puerto Ricans were somehow orphaned. But this is a mythical motherland that has little to do with the Spain of the 1970s and 1980s. Pablo’s patronymic game is reproduced on a larger scale. Given Escudero’s status as not only the dead father but the wrong father (not the squire but the servant), Sarah’s children define themselves only in reference to her family, the Defillós. At the estate auction the grandchildren also put up for sale a Bell telephone with which they claim their grandmother, Sara Elena Amigué de Defilló, made the first transatlantic phone call from Puerto Rico, to composer Antonio Paoli during a concert engagement in New York. The choice of the name Defilló is worthy of note; the accent on the last syllable identifies it as Catalan, but the name is no longer found in Catalonia. Although not particularly common, the name does exist in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, and is probably in that group of names about which Catalan genealogist Santi Arbós writes: “Curiously, some sur-

names . . . no longer found in Catalonia are relatively common in Latin America" (8).

The use of the last name Defilló has two interesting implications. First, it draws attention to the artificiality of the family's reconstruction of its past, for Catalan migration to America was overwhelmingly a nineteenth-century phenomenon. It is unlikely that any Captain Fernando Defilló would have defended—or surrendered, as Mayito "clarifies"—the Fort of San Felipe del Morro to the Dutch in 1625.<sup>6</sup> Thus the ancestry employed by the film to signify *puertorriqueñidad* is a relatively recent—if hegemonic—addition to the patchwork of Puerto Rican diversity. Secondly, Defilló is not just any Catalan last name. Although this is not well known outside some social circles, Defilló is the maternal last name of that most famous of post-Civil War immigrants to Puerto Rico, Pau Casals i Defilló (in celebration of whom the yearly Casals Festival is held in San Juan's temple of high culture, the Centro de Bellas Artes). Casals was born in 1876 in El Vendrell (Tarragona), but his mother Pilar had been born in 1853 in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, of Catalan parents. Her own maternal last name was Amiguet, the same as Sara's, except for the original final "t," which might, anachronistically, make Sara Casals's fictional aunt. The importance of the name Defilló to Puerto Rican culture is revealed by the fact that one of the island's major contributions to the 2004 Feria Internacional del Libro de Guadalajara, inaugurated on November 28 of that year with Catalan culture as its "invitada de honor" (honored guest), is a photographic exhibit entitled "Los Defilló" about the musician's Puerto Rican family. According to the exhibit's curator Pedro Ángel Reina, "obviously we want to highlight the fact that Pablo Casals spent the latter part of his life in Puerto Rico, that he made this island his home, that he established very deep roots in the culture and in the musical institutions, and that *he launched himself into the world from Puerto Rico*" (qtd. in Morales Feliciano; my emphasis).

This focus on Casals and the Defillós recalls some of the old insistence on class and race pedigree, as well as the identification of Spanish culture as constitutive of Puerto Rican culture. There is also, however, a reappropriation of Spanish culture that adapts it to Puerto Rico's own cultural mappings. Moreover, this reappropriation of the motherland somehow inverts the relationship between

the former empire and the former colony, rendering Puerto Rico as a source culture. In a sense, “we” (Puerto Ricans) gave Casals to the world (and eventually back to Spain). In the film, after their very amicable divorce, Gustavo and Pilar longingly wonder what happened: “[Gustavo:] Sometimes I wonder exactly what motivated our separation, and I can’t find a definitive cause.” Although they do not remarry, Gustavo and Pilar have a sexual encounter on the night of his father’s death. Their renewed bond continues even after Pilar returns to Spain with their only son (for whom she argues there will be better special schools) and Gustavo’s niece Tita, who in turn will take to Spain everything about her that is not Spanish (her African and New York heritage). In this version of the conquest story, it is Spain that is about to be recolonized.

The figures of Tita and Pilar, and the ultimate link between them, are particularly suggestive of Jacobo Morales’s attitude toward the construction of Puerto Rican identity. The two characters are played by experienced Puerto Rican actors Adamari López and Ivette Rodríguez, respectively, and both performances direct attention to what seem to be gaping holes in a motion picture otherwise carefully crafted, despite overwhelming financial constraints. In the production diary, Morales notes the careful research process that he had López follow in order to prepare for her role: “Someone mentioned a public school, the Padre Rufo, I think, that specializes in ‘Newyorican’ students. Adamari will attend that school as an auditor for awhile in order to become more familiar with the way of speaking of our compatriots born here and transported to New York at an early age” (26). In the context of this attention to detail, what does not appear to make sense is the choice of this actor to play the daughter of a black mother: a curly black wig was not enough to mask López’s fair skin, straight hair (generally dyed light), and blue eyes.<sup>7</sup> A similar incongruity affects Ivette Rodríguez’s performance of Pilar, as the actor’s artificial Spanish accent, full of Puerto Rican turns of phrase and Puerto Rican intonation, is immediately identified as fake. This performance contrasts with Morales’s own flawless characterization of a Puerto Rican who has spent a long time in Spain.

As a veteran, Oscar-nominated director, Morales could have insisted on truer-to-type casting choices from among the many



mixed-race or Spanish-born actors who were available.<sup>8</sup> In fact, his diary notes how he carefully cast most roles himself. For example, he made sure that the height difference between the actors playing the young and the old Alejandro and Sara was approximately the same. He also noted that “the casting coordinator complained that I haven’t allowed her much influence in the selection of the principal actors” (14). His selection of these particular players must, then, be taken as part of his vision for the film. In breaking with realist performance precisely in the case of the two characters who personify “imported” cultures, *Linda Sara* draws attention to the problematics they embody. Morales self-consciously plays with them in a creative recombination of cultural elements that favors overt simulacrum over painstaking imitation. Rather than attempting to sort out the different elements of Puerto Rican culture in search of its real essence (*qué somos*), Jacobo Morales reimagines both the usual figure of recovery (the Newyorican, the *negrita*) and the simultaneously seductive and motherly figure of the Spaniard, deliberately rendering both of them token and simulated. This strategy does not minimize the importance of either, but instead tells another story (“otro relato”) that places them in dynamic relationship to highlight continuity and discontinuity and include appropriation and invention (*cómo somos*).

*Linda Sara*’s characters either willingly or unknowingly falsify their Spanish past, recounting their (hi)story according to their present needs. This self-fabrication is reinforced at the narrative level, through the overt artificiality of the performances that points to the problem of national identity. How is it possible to interpret this insistent retelling, clearly opposed to Sara’s own aphasia, and even to the other silences in the film (for example, Sofia’s sexual awakening is never named)? Díaz Quiñones himself provides a clue when he calls attention to how Puerto Rico’s *mutilated* memory and *broken* past give rise to new historiographic projects, “dedicated to remembering with the help of imagination” (17). This is, indeed, *otro relato*. It is not one that was pre-written and needs to be rediscovered, but one in a constant process of rewriting, as it draws on a multiplicity of cultural, political, ethnic, and sexual identities.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabba states that:

terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. . . . The 'right' to signify from the periphery of authorized power and privilege does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are 'in the minority'. The recognition that tradition bestows is a partial form of identification. In restaging the past it introduces other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition. (2)

Rather than simply remembering, recovering, or even re-constructing their Spanish origins, the characters of *Linda Sara*, the film itself, and even many members of a certain class of Puerto Ricans *perform* them. It is notable that all the elements used to signify Spanishness in the film—intradiegetically, the iconic figures of Casals and the Defillós, and extradiegetically, the Puerto Rican actress who plays Pilar—are elements already present in Puerto Rican culture. Even the title of the film comes from a nineteenth-century Puerto Rican *danza*. This autochthonous music allowed Puerto Rican society to conceive of itself as European and recreate the elegant ballrooms of Spanish cities; at the same time it served as one of the requisite cultural products that signaled a mature nation with its own musical and aesthetic patrimony. Thus, Morales's ambiguous look at the presence and meaning of Spain in Puerto Rican culture reinscribes that tradition into a new tradition-in-the-making, placing it in productive tension with other constitutive elements of contemporary Puerto Rican identity. He attempts to represent an overt hybridity that neither embraces nor suppresses the part of Spanish culture that is integral to Puerto Rican identity, but rather places it into Juan Flores's "relational model directed at identifying the contacts and crossings that the culture experiences as a social practice."

At the end of *Linda Sara*, most of the house's inhabitants have left, without worrying about the possessions—the baggage, the history—that so obsessed them throughout the film. Sofía is living her life without regard to labels. Mayito's book is a success, and nobody much cares about its rigorous authenticity. Whereas earlier Pilar lamented that "if there is anything we cannot control it is memory," now Sara leaves behind her world of real or false memories and climbs into Alejandro's carriage, while her young voice off-camera



says that “last night I dreamt that things turned out as I wished.” Sara seems to have joined her children’s readiness to invent the future; she even transcends the ways in which they are marked by inherited notions of race, class, and decorum. Her story, perhaps like Mayito’s remaining volumes, Gustavo’s new letters to Pilar, and Sofía’s undefined love affair, remains to be written in an original, if contingent and contradictory, fashion.

### Notes

1 In 1888, Francisco Mariano Quiñones documented the recent arrest of Mr. Mejía and other prominent Yauco residents in a government raid against *autonomistas*: “The news from Yauco . . . became clearer on Monday. The venerable Father Pieretti had been arrested . . . Drs. Pasarell and Franceschi were being held in solitary confinement, as well as the respectable landowners Mr. Mariani, Mr. Mejía, Mr. Matei . . . and a thousand more that I don’t remember at this moment” (133-34).

2 As part of its economic development strategy, “Operation Bootstrap,” begun by the Popular Democratic Party in 1948, promoted massive migration to the mainland United States in order to alleviate the strain on the island’s native resources and allow Puerto Ricans who became part of the United States labor force to create and import wealth.

3 On March 21, 1937, the United States-appointed Puerto Rican Governor, General Blanton Winship, and the Island’s Police Chief, General Enrique de Orbeta, pressured the Ponce mayor and local police chief to cancel a previously granted permit to hold a Nationalist Party march through the city’s streets. The Party decided to go on with the rally, and the police force fired on the unarmed demonstrators with machine guns, rifles, and pistols. At least 17 Nationalists were killed, and more than 150 were wounded. As a result of the ensuing investigations, President Franklin D. Roosevelt eventually dismissed Governor Winship from his post in May 1939.

4 Unless otherwise noted, quotations from *Linda Sara* are from the film and not the script. In referring to “the family’s” histories and memoirs, I mean the Defillós. The importance of the particular name will be made evident further on. The importance of the maternal line of descent is underscored by the fact that Morales deviates from the original script, inverting José Vicente’s and Sara’s original surnames: in the published version, they ap-

pear as Sara Inés Escudero and José Vicente Defilló y Mercado, with all the corresponding changes in the scenes that allude to the family's past.

5 The following is the scene as printed in the script. The dialogue between Sofia and Paula is omitted from the film, where we can only see them talking without hearing their words:

Sofia's eyes search amongst those present...

SOFÍA: Excuse me.

Sofia moves forward among the guests. She receives congratulations en route.

Gustavo comes forward, and stands next to Pilar.

PILAR: It sounded great.

SOFÍA: (Annoyed.) It could have been better, but Mario's blasted typewriter threw me off. Please, can't he stop that for just a little while? (*She spies her close friend PAULA, who has just come in.*)

She goes over to Paula (who is younger than Sofia; her appearance and her gestures reflect a certain hardness).

Why are you just now arriving?

Paula kisses her.

Change of shot.

Gustavo registers personal displeasure at Paula's presence.

6 César Yáñez Gallardo documents that during the sixteenth century Catalans made up less than one percent of Spanish migrants to America, and their presence increased very little over the next one hundred and fifty years: "The first period of increase in Catalan emigration and commerce in America came during the last third of the eighteenth century and was intimately linked to the 'liberalization' of colonial traffic after 1765, but especially from 1778 on" (45). The period between 1835 and 1865 saw "the greatest increase in Catalan overseas emigration in the nineteenth century" (55), and Cuba and Puerto Rico offered the institutional structures to allow both ease of movement and establishment of successful commercial networks between the metropolis and the colonies. In Puerto Rico, Catalans constituted the largest group of Spanish immigrants—forty-three percent of the total between 1800 and 1830: "in this sense, perhaps the Catalans were more hegemonic in Puerto Rico than in Cuba. But, as in the neighboring island, the Catalans were dispersed over the entire Puerto Rican territory and dominated virtually every commercial and maritime sector" (91).

7 At Escudero's funeral, a family friend asks: "And who does that girl take after her grandmothers?" It must be that the mother is black."

8 His 1989 *Lo que le pasó a Santiago* (What Happened to Santiago) was nominated for the Best Foreign Language Film category in the 1990 Academy Awards competition.

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